OUR THREE WEEKS OF BLINDNESS

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A CHRISTMAS-DAY CROP OF BABIES AT A HOSPITAL IN LONDON

Including a pair of twins, in the arms of the doctor disguised as Santa. Despite their blinkings, and boasts of their intelligence by proud parents, we are told they can see nothing in their first three weeks of life. Hearing, touch, taste, and smell are also very rudimentary.

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Lit Digest Dec. 15 1928

OUR THREE WEEKS OF BLINDNESS

EACH OF US WAS ONCE BLIND. During the first three weeks of our babyhood we could not see. We "didn't take notice," the nurse said; and the reason was that we could not use our eyes at all. So, at least, we are assured by a writer in *The American Weekly* (New York), summarizing information recently given out by Dr. Park Lewis, vice-president of the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness. When a new-born baby seems to be staring fixedly at its adoring mother or at its kindly nurse, what it actually sees is—nothing. The new eyes, still unskilled in what will be their job through life, are far more likely to be attracted by an open window into the sunlight or by a near-by electric lamp than by anything human. To quote from the article:

"Old-fashioned nurses used to say after a few days that the new baby was beginning to 'take notice'; a phrase which has the full approval of modern science. For about three weeks after birth, says Dr. Lewis, a baby can not really see anything clearly.

"These three blind weeks are not altogether eye-blind. They are brain-blind, too, for the brain has not yet learned what eye messages mean. Messages that go to the brain centers from the ears need also to be learned and sorted. Touch messages are, perhaps, understood a little better; for these are simpler. Perhaps the sensations that adults call taste and smell are equally lacking. But the deficiency is more likely to be in the sorting and interpreting office in the untrained brain than in the ear or nose or other organ of sense.

"The baby's eye has, however, some beginner's handicaps of its own. For example, the eyes of virtually all white children are very light in color at birth; most of them are blue. The darkening pigment which Nature is to provide later on as a protection against the too brilliant sunlight of southern lands has not yet been manufactured in the tender tissues.

"Eye movement is not yet accurate or speedy. The muscles which move the young adult's eyes like lightning from one side or another, to seek pleasure or to watch for danger, have not yet learned their duties or fallen under the sway of the nerve centers deep in the base of the brain.

"Even for many months after birth one incompleteness of the baby's eye may last. The eye is very likely to be farsighted, like the eye of an old man.

"When babies are born their eyeballs are seldom quite finished. It is probable that nearly all babies have sight blurred badly and can see objects close at hand only if their eyes are fitted with tiny glasses like little old men. Babies a few weeks old sometimes recognize persons at a little distance better than when the person is first seen close at hand. Nature will correct this presently, for the eyeball grows gradually longer and soon forms the necessary sharp focus at just the right distance from the eye's lens."

Another thing probably wrong with the sight of young babies is that they are color-blind, the author tells us. Not long ago, he says, Prof. F. M. Gregg, of Nebraska Wesleyan University, found that even cats and dogs see colors very poorly. Raccoons are more completely color-blind. The same fact has been found by Dr. A. E. Hopkins about mice. If baby seems to like mama's red dress, that is not apt to be because of the color. More probably the clothes have different smells or one dress is brighter and lighter than the other. To quote again:

"A few people are completely color-blind and also 'day-blind.' In the dark these people see well enough. In the strong light of day they can not see at all. Perhaps some babies, at birth, have this complete kind of color-blindness and day-blindness combined, due to the failure of the cones in their eyes to form in time. It is probable, however, that this complete kind of color-blindness is due to the brain rather than the eye.

"The distinguished English physiologist, Dr. Ernest H. Starling, recently concluded that partially color-blind individuals have something wrong with the sorting machinery in the brain, not with the perceiving machinery in the eye. This is probably what is wrong with babies' eyes.

"A few months ago an eighteen-year-old girl at Lincoln, Nebraska, suddenly acquired her sight after having been blind from birth. Her experiences, news-dispatches report, were peculiar. She could see a chair, but she had no faintest idea what it was. When she went and felt of the chair she knew instantly. One by one, she needed laboriously to learn the looks of familiar things that she knew only by touch. Just so, Dr. Lewis's theory says, the baby needs to learn the looks of everything.

"This learning is probably not unlike learning to walk or to speak. Perhaps in the long-distant future, babies will be born able to walk and speak within a few days or weeks. Nothing like that has happened yet.

of it is the real objective of Mr. Hoover's trip, says the *Vossische Zeitung*, which adds:

"There are two observers of the President-elect's journey, and they are following with anguish the progress of the Stars and Stripes on the *Maryland*, namely, England and Spain. To put the matter bluntly, there will be a struggle in the near future between the pound and the dollar for supremacy in Latin-American economics.

"In Washington they laugh as much about academic pan-Iberianism as over pan-Latinism, which has been already tried as a protection against the hegemony of Washington. The goal is the control of the oil-fields of all America. Mr. Hoover is the oil expert of the United States, and he wants to protect the North American oil-fields from exhaustion by the acquisition of other sources."

AUSTRIA AN "UNSOLVED PROBLEM"

AUSTRIA'S RIVAL FASCIST AND SOCIALIST ARMIES, which threatened to make trouble a few weeks ago, were handled in masterly manner, we are told, by the Austrian Government. They put Vienna in a state of siege in order that the Fascists should have their march of demonstration in the forenoon and be out of the way before the Socialists began theirs in the afternoon. According to the Manchester *Guardian* both the Fascist and the Socialist forces proclaim themselves as purely defensive protectors against possible external enemies. But this, we are told, "creates an intolerable situation in which nerves are dangerously strained and a *coup d'état* by either organization is possible without any warning." To allow unofficial armies to be organized is a blunder, to permit them to reach the present pitch of efficiency was criminal, in the judgment of *The Guardian*. Meanwhile Vienna press dispatches advise us that the National Assembly has elected Wilhelm Miklas second President of the Austrian Republic for a four-year term. The first two ballots were indecisive, we are told, but on the third the Social Democrats withdrew their candidate, former Chancellor Dr. Karl Renner. Surveying Austria's transformation as a result of the war, Dr. Renner, in a London Labor journal, *The Daily Herald*, recalls that:

"The word 'Austria' has two meanings for the world at large. For four hundred years the idea of a great world-Power was coupled with it. From 1526 until 1918 it stood for the mighty Empire on the Danube, which was built up by the German princely House of Hapsburg out of the German Alpine countries, the Lands of the Bohemian and the Hungarian Crowns; for a time it included also Northern Italy and a part of Poland.

"This great Power broke up in 1918 under the hammer-blows of the Allied armies. The Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, and Jugoslavs formed their own States, and the inhabitants of the German Alpine districts on the Danube—the original family property of the Counts and Grand Dukes of Hapsburg—were left high and dry, deserted by those who for four hundred years had shared with them good and evil fortune.

"Not only was this country left overnight with no guiding hand and no future. It was flooded with disordered troops streaming back, horrified and bitterly angry, from the Italian front. What was to happen to these German provinces—what was to be the fate of its inhabitants? History will one day record that alone the Social-Democratic Labor party did not lose its head, but found a way out of the chaos and took the lead."

Dr. Renner goes on to say that, owing to the impulse given by this party, all German deputies of the old Austrian Parliament assembled on October 21, 1918, in Vienna and declared themselves to be a provisional representative body for the German parts of Austria—that is to say, representative of "German Austria." They decided to form its inhabitants into a separate State and to set up an independent government. We are then informed that:

"The National Assembly formed a committee with full powers to draft a constitution. On November 12 the Constituent National Assembly adopted the provisional Constitution, and declared that all the German lands of the old Empire now formed the German-Austrian Republic.

"In this notable assembly sat also representatives of German South Tyrol and of the German territories of the present-day Czechoslovakia. These territories also, by the free voice of the people, declared their adherence to German Austria. Had the 'Right of Self-Determination,' as proclaimed by President Wilson, been allowed to have effect, these territories would to-day form part of Austria, with a population of at least 10,000,000.

"But German Austria, tho only one-eighth of the old Danube Monarchy, was condemned by the Peace Conference of St. Germain in 1919 to bear alone the war-guilt for the whole and (what was of much more evil effect) the war debts. South Tyrol was given to Italy, and more than three million Germans to Czechoslovakia, so that there remained only a tiny State of six millions, nearly one-third of whom inhabit the capital, Vienna.

"Thus, there was created a State-form unfitted to live at all, with a State capital—the fourth largest in Europe—having practically no economic hinterland. The frontiers are drawn at thirty miles distance from this capital! It is precisely as tho Paris with a few neighboring departments were to be cut out of France, deprived of access to the sea, surrounded with high customs walls, and declared to be an independent State.

"The State thus created was forbidden in the Treaty of St. Germain to unite with the other Germans of Europe in a common State, despite the fact that for centuries Vienna herself was the capital of the Empire of the Germans.

"All the greater difficulties with which the Austrian Republic has had to contend during these ten years can be traced back to these unhappy provisions of the Treaty of St. Germain. At the foundation of the Republic on November 12, 1918, the Constituent National Assembly declared unanimously that 'German Austria is a part of the German Republic.'"

Union with Germany was immediately adopted as the national program, we are told, and this advocate of the Austrian Social-Democratic party in Austria goes on to say that during the first two years of its existence the Austrian Republic (1918-20) was "governed by a coalition of Social-Democrats and Christian Socials." We read then:

"At the élections held in the autumn of 1920 the Social-Democratic representation was weakened, and the Christian Socials secured a majority. From 1920 until to-day the country has been ruled by the bourgeois parties' *bloc*, headed by the Christian-Social party and its leader, Dr. Ignaz Seipel. This *bloc* secured the majority—tho on each occasion a smaller one—at the two elections of 1924 and 1927.

"The bourgeois-*bloc* Government was at the start strongly influenced by monarchist propaganda, and by the neighboring country of Hungary, where the throne was upheld and reserved for the Hapsburgs. Bit by bit, however, the republican idea has grown stronger, and to-day predominates in bourgeois circles also.

"The terms of the St. Germain peace were ratified in 1919 by the Coalition Government. From 1920 onwards the bourgeois *bloc* has been solely responsible for foreign policy. Austria entered the League of Nations, and through the mediation of Geneva, the Federal Chancellor, Dr. Seipel, secured the so-called 'League Loan' for the rehabilitation of the State finances and the stabilization of the currency. For five years now the country has had the benefit of the stable schilling currency, tho it has never obtained relief from the general economic crisis. Still many factories stand idle—the number of unemployed is, for so small a country, simply terrifying. Still is the country shaken by social crisis following social crisis.

"Despite this economic depression, the Social-Democratic Labor party in Austria has managed to keep the workers influenced by Communist propaganda. Bolshevism found no soil to grow in in Austria. Nevertheless, Fascist movements have arisen of recent years under the influence of the Italian neighbor, their leaders fired by the example of Mussolini. Heavy industry has equipped from its financial resources armed bands, which threaten the working classes and seek to sweep away the social welfare measures made law through the Social-Democrats, and to abolish democratic government."

Dr. Renner then calls attention to the fact that the working classes in Austria have prepared for resistance, and have formed a body which, "if unarmed, is of semimilitary character, for the protection of the republic—the Republican Defense Corps." There have been frequent collisions between the two formations, and again and again "workers have been shot down by the Fascists."

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The Literary Digest for December 15, 1928

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